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Housing for Blighted Areas

A famous architect once observed that "man is a cave dwelling animal and avoids bright light, therefore we should build houses with low windows and overhanging roofs." Later he noticed man cavorting in the light upper air on his new metal wings and now he says we must have "glass houses" and "decentralization." City centers of economy, culture and cooperation must give way to scattered individual units related by the radio and the flying machine. Is that true? Are superficial observations of certain beneficent achievements emanating from human centralization to be mistaken for the co-operative forces of urban culture producing them? Effects must not be confused with causes if we are to solve our housing problems properly, that is, in harmony with natural laws.

Forces of nature, especially human nature, created cities as a means of advancing the cultural spirit of man in the discovery and development of the physical and mental forces of his nature. Human nature is not unlike other forms of nature wherein co-operative centralization is force and power, and decentralization is dissipation and disintegration. Nature still utilizes flocks and tribes, swarms and schools, continents and oceans, even centralized solar systems, for her great creative ends.

Central forces that go out beyond the corona stay out forever. Decentralized forces degenerate to passive influences. A form of decentralization in our cities produced slums. Rather than rehabilitate our central areas to conform to the changed conditions we ourselves made, we moved out to, or beyond, the limits and left the central core to blight and decay. This economic, civic and social blight is so great that decentralizationists now talk of abandoning the city idea altogether. But the city is probably as permanent an idea of society as the home or family is a fixed ideal of humanity.

City housing is a social problem—a problem because of neglect and the weakness of the collective spirit of citizens rather than lack of intelligence. Modern city housing is the provision of homes for families of the 60% to 70% of the working and producing population for whom no adequate housing has been provided for the past quarter of a century; homes with light, air, modern sanitation and refrigeration; with shrubs, trees and other amenities of nature; close to and among places of play, work and worship and within easy reach of parks, museums, theaters, libraries and other advantages that only cities can provide or have as yet afforded.

Rehabilitation of city blighted areas is the process of saving the partially abandoned lots, streets and civic utilities, once ideally used but now an economic waste, a social menace, and a comparatively useless civic expense. It is scrapping obsolete structures, assembling the little lots and improving them in wholesale fashion to their "highest and best use." Chicago has five or six thousand acres of such areas surrounding its heart and center, provided with adequate arteries for commerce and industry, ideally located for good housing, within easy reach of the finest collection of schools, colleges, museums, concert halls, theaters, lake-parks and other civic amenities the world has ever known.

The population of this blighted area has been decreasing about 20% at each census period for the past thirty to forty years. A few of the older generation are still confined to their now obsolete homes, their children having escaped to better places in which to live. Much of the population consists of the "dregs of humanity," of homeless men and drifting women and boarders, vicious and resentful hoodlum gangs like the "Forty-Two Gang" which Judge Borrelli described as "human rats that sleep all morning, come out of their holes about noon and get to work at night, terrorizing and preying upon honest citizens." Many of the families forced to live in these areas, however, though poor and oppressed because not understood, possess strong character and much latent taste and wisdom, inherited from the best of old world traditions and institutions, whose children are destined to fill high places in American culture and leadership if their qualities are not to be snuffed out by the unspeakable environment in which they are now compelled to grow up.

Modern methods of building and modern organization of financing can provide good fireproof homes in this region for from three to six times the possible present population and leave one-half the land for open air gardens and play grounds, at a cost to tenants of about what they now have to pay.

To put such a vast productive population into decent homes within reach of such an array of schools, colleges, museums and libraries as we now have nearby would make a marked national impression. It is an unparalleled situation and opportunity for the use of an unparalleled collection of educational and cultural institutions for the advancement of American culture and character.

To accomplish such a rehabilitation a comprehensive building, financial and management organization is required. A plan for such an organization has been devised and promulgated by the Blighted Area Housing Committee of the Architects Club of Chicago.

This plan suggests the creation of a Chicago Funded Housing Trust Estate similar to the Chicago Community Trust or the one hundred year old Girard Trust in Philadelphia, having the fidelity of a Trust Company and the attractive elements of Mutual Savings Banks and Building and Loan Associations. It consists of a trust company trustee, a managing committee, or co-trustees, of seven or more civic minded citizens of experience and prestige and a management company of experience in the purchase, sale and management of real estate who would assemble investment funds and properties into the trust and improve and manage them under the general direction of the trustees.

The plan does not involve the purchase of real estate so much as the assembly of lots into block areas in trust at a value on a par with cash. About 6% to 8% of the blighted area property is owned by those who use it, the balance is owned or carried by people who have no use for it and cannot profitably improve it as individual lots. The assessed valuation is so low that if taxes were paid the tax

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yield would not nearly pay for the necessary upkeep of its streets, public utilities and services. This property improved under the trust plan would have a value five to ten times its present assessed value and support a population that could pay its proportion of the cost of government much more easily than the present population indirectly pays inadequate taxes.

The plan provides for a splendid use for philanthropic funds and for the collection and direct investment of savings, similar to that of Mutual Savings Banks and Building and Loan Associations. Considering that the Mutual Savings Banks of the Eastern states have increased their deposits over a billion dollars during the depression and that not one of them has failed to function normally, and considering that the Trust can provide the same kind of direct investment for savings without the middleman's expense of administration, commissions, etc., this source of funds for housing may become very important.

A minor feature of the Architects Club plan involves the capitalization of the well recognized (but not hitherto used) value to buildings of tenant ownership versus absentee ownership, by adding a differential to dividends accruing to tenant investors of 1/10th to 1/6th the regular dividends, so that if dividends to non-tenant owners are 5% (or 10%), the dividend to tenant owners on the 1/10th basis would be 5½% (or 11%). That differential can be quite accurately determined and carried out on a strictly business basis to encourage and reward home ownership and thrift.

Only a very small proportion of the blighted area property surrounding Chicago's industrial, commercial, educational and cultural center is now encumbered by reason of its present lack of productive value. Perhaps if such a plan of rehabilitation be put into effect, little or no mortgage money may eventually be required. To provide a nearby resident owning population that can pay its proper taxes and cause the adjacent great collection of shops and factories, museums and colleges to function adequately, is a consummation greatly to be desired.

—Henry K. Holsman.

Another View and an Answer

Building Investment (New York) for October in the article "Modernize the Tenements" says:

"The second plan is a true replacement of old tenements by blocks of new ones of more scientific plan as to health, space and comfort provisions. Apparently these projects must be subsidized by government or philanthropy if the per-room rentals are to compare with those of the buildings replaced. What few projects of this kind have been carried through have usually gone up one flight in the scale of rentals by the time the final cost sheets were added up. They start on a \$9 a room basis and end up at \$12 to \$15. Even \$9 a room is a great deal for families of very low earning power, unless the rooms are much larger than those of the usual tenement. In the absence of convincing data to the contrary it seems reasonable to assume that tenement district improvement by replacement is so expensive that it surely entails a rise in rentals. The better accommodations offered are doubtless worth it but the tenancy is necessarily limited to those who can afford the higher rent. But the neighborhood improvement does not do the others much good, for they have to go elsewhere in the lower rent zones."

Answer: I do not believe cities can successfully develop proper housing continuously in America through subsidies by tax exemption, or municipal or state financing, ownership or management. A state housing policy cannot long exist half subsidy, half private. If we come to rely on state aid, we stultify individual initiative and invention of ways and means. Private initiative cannot stand competition with state aid. Tenement district improvement in New York City by replacement might be too expensive to be practical, while it would be wholly practical in Chicago. Property on the Lower East Side near the garment workers' new housing has an average assessed valuation of about \$14.00 a square foot, while in Chicago property better located in respect to places of employment, recreation and cultural advantages has an average value of about \$2.00 a square foot.

—Henry K. Holsman.

Air Conditioning

It's in the Air and in the Mouths of Babes,—But Where Can an Architect Obtain Tangible Data on Costs?

The problems of filtration, humidifying, dehumidifying, heating, washing, cooling and purifying air in order to make it fit for human consumption engaged the attention of the Society at a recent meeting. The purpose of the assemblage, as advertised, was to dispel the confusion surrounding this subject and clear up the many questions perplexing architects out of work or out after work.

But zounds! As the sweet bard of Avon would say, confusion is worse confounded. The engineers captured our sincerest admiration by the deft manner in which they toyed with thermostats, ductostats and humidistats. The contractors intrigued our deepest interest with their manipulation of solenoids, paranoids and schizoids. But both of them left us with nothing but aching voids when the subject veered to the matter of costs. Floundering around in a sea of bewilderment, the architects cried out desperately but vainly for a life-line of understanding in the form of cost data, but nary a datum was there.

How much does it cost? Well does the architect realize the portent of those five fateful words. They compose the first question the client asks of his architect and their answer is the last thing said client ever forgets—especially if the final cost is not in agreement therewith.

Accurate cost data is absolutely essential to the architect. Rapid methods for making preliminary approximations of cost are just as vital. Conditioned air is no exception to the general run. The very fact that it is rapidly coming into popularity, furnishes the more potent reason for the necessary basic data. If the engineers and the contractors fail us, there is only one source of information left. We must turn to the politicians. They are experts on air, though much of it lacks any conditioning.

—Tirrell J. Ferrenz.

In April, 1930 the B. & O. dining car "Martha Washington" went into service as the first air conditioned railroad car, says the Armstrong Insulator. Then followed in May, 1931 "The Columbian" running between New York and Washington, a train with diner, parlor cars and coaches completely air-conditioned. The patronage of this train showed an increase of 600%. In May, 1931 the "National Limited" and "Capitol Limited" long distance sleeping car trains of this road were completely air-conditioned. Other roads now air-condition their dining cars.

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Committee on Public Information

E. S. HALL, CHAIRMAN TIRRELL J. FERRENZ ARTHUR WOLTERS DORF

To be in the vanguard of progress in Architecture and Building; to recognize social economics in its reflex on housing and other institutions; to study finance in relation to building projects; to disseminate news of the profession of particular interest to Illinois architects—these and more subjects the MONTHLY BULLETIN of the Illinois Society of Architects proposes to discuss in its pages. Co-operation of members with the editor to this end is essential and correspondence from all quarters is invited.

The October meeting of the Illinois Society of Architects was addressed by C. E. Fawkes on "Prediction of the Appeal of a Color Scheme." The speaker ran the gamut from quotations of ancient poets to modern landscape painters and many references to the paint chemist's laboratory of today. Electric lamps that simulate daylight and color panels were used for illustration.

Earl H. Reed, Jr., Head of the Department of Architecture at Armour Institute of Technology, recently opened a series of educational broadcasts to be presented regularly by Armour each Thursday from 2:30 to 2:45 P. M. and Sundays from 6:00 to 6:30 P. M. on Station WJJD, with an interesting review of the movements in architectural history and a discussion of modern architecture with particular reference to Chicago buildings. His subjects were "The Story of Stone" and "The Story of Steel."

The Building Code Committee of the Society is not ready to report on the status of the new building code for Chicago. The Council is still considering and discussing the question in meeting and for this reason the Committee does not wish to be quoted.

Mr. Harry B. Wheelock is convalescing after a serious operation. It is good news that his recovery more than keeps pace with the most sanguine hopes of his physician. A hearty welcome in the company of his colleagues awaits him.

Rejuvenation of the Chicago Auditorium

Carved on a panel over the south fireplace on the Box Foyer of the Chicago Auditorium, we read:

"I wish that this great building may continue to be to all your population that which it should be, opening its doors from night to night, calling your people away from cares of business to their enjoyment and entertainment, which develop the soul of the man and inspire those whose lives are heavy with daily toil, and in this magnificent and enchanted presence, lift them for a time out of dull things into those higher things where men should live.

—Benjamin Harrison.

President of the United States at the dedication of the Auditorium, December 9th, 1889."

On the morning of November 3rd, 1932, some forty-three years later, and while making a notation of the above, the writer stood in the center of a scene of great activity.

A veritable Renaissance; an effort, it seemed, entirely directed to the intent that the above sentiment shall be permitted to persist. A further investigation became almost a pilgrimage; so much has happened in those forty-three years that the date of dedication seemed to recede to a far-off time of long ago. Throughout the structure with its slightly tilting columns, its inclined floors due to a long embrace with Chicago clay, there is created an atmosphere that gives to its mosaic floors and the building generally a feeling somewhat reminiscent of Saint Marks, Venice, or the like.

In the cleaning and repairs incident to the general rehabilitation that the Chicago Auditorium is undergoing many of the ideas and effects intended by Adler and Sullivan, the original designers, are being brought to light from beneath the accumulated coatings of the years.

It would appear that an original decorative scheme of white and gold with direct lighting was changed to red and gold during the period of the gay nineties with the idea that the bejeweled adornments affected at that period would shine to better effect.

This may have happened, but alas, against the red background and the quiescence of indirect lighting, the luster of elaborate gowns was lost and a background of grey was later resorted to in an endeavor to correct this.

To this the passing of the years added layers of dirt and grime and the problem of redecorating became a fascinating and difficult task as the cleaning revealed the real color of marbles and mosaics, and dingy surfaces became surprisingly changed to real gold.

From a forest of scaffolding, as much as 70,000 feet, it would seem that an old friend is being arrayed with a new garment of color and cheer, with a golden brilliance, a scintillating sparkle, and in a manner that, in all probability, Louis H. Sullivan would have done in this age. From the topmost heights of the scaffolding Charles Holloway is retouching the mural that he painted above the proscenium arch forty-three years ago.

At this time it would be difficult to describe the finished effect and, maybe as with the climax of a movie story, it should be left for the individual observer to experience.

Sufficient to say, perhaps, that to the real color of marble and mosaics, the native beauty of woods and the glow of gold is being added which lightens the effect, ac-

centuates ornament and architectural arrangement and pulls the scheme together into one harmonious whole, while crystal fixtures, new carpeting and draperies provide furnishings to form a picture that needs only the swirl of crowds to become complete.

It is natural to find that the entire electrical installation is being modernized as required to meet the demands of present day theatrical productions, with new wiring and lamps, with a completely new stage control switchboard and dimmer equipment, all of the most modern type; add to this new footlights, emergency lighting and the whole gamut of electrical facilities that will satisfactorily accommodate the most elaborate of operatic presentations.

All of the work of rehabilitating this famous interior is being carried out under the direction of Holabird and Root, with John H. Hopkins of that firm in personal charge of decorations.

One is impressed by the feeling that here, at least, is a real place for the production of Opera, Drury Lane Dramas, or possibly an old fashioned Christmas pantomime, equally with any form of show that future development may demand.

It seems to be assured that the following inscription to be found above the north fireplace of the Box Foyer will remain as true as when first installed:

"I have stood in every great hall and sat in all the famous theaters and opera houses in the world but in its unrivalled acoustics both for oratory and music, in its unequalled capacity to comfortably accommodate vast audiences and in the harmony and taste of its ornamentation this Auditorium of Chicago is without a rival or a peer. Chauncey M. Depew, June 5th, 1890."

Henry J. B. Hoskins.

Another Name Added in the Evolution of the American Skeleton Frame High Building

In Vol. IX Dictionary of American Biography (Scribner 1932) in the biography of William Holabird you are told that when making the first plans in 1886 for a corner building 25' x 110' at Madison and LaSalle Streets, Chicago, a plan that grew into what later became the Tacoma Building, Holabird and Roche recalled a suggestion of Sanford E. Loring. Loring had developed sectional drawings "to the effect that a building might be constructed with a skeleton of iron on which thin terra cotta walls and tile floors could be supported. Holabird's former employer, W. L. B. Jenney, had tried out a scheme in 1884-85 in the major portion of his Home Insurance Building in Chicago which consisted in enclosing iron columns in brick masonry piers with iron lintels and spandrel girders supported by brackets on the columns. In the Tacoma Building this primitive arrangement was improved by the addition of brackets for the direct support of the masonry pier facings."

John M. Van Osdel (1811-1892), Chicago's earliest architect, had in his office as apprentice Sanford E. Loring. Later Loring became a partner of W. L. B. Jenney. Loring entered the terra cotta business in the late 60's continuing to 1879 and in these years lifted the craft to a point where rapid development was possible. Then Loring faded out of the terra cotta business. In 1878 the Boston English High and Latin School was contracted for. Its terra cotta trimmings were awarded to the Chicago Terra Cotta Works. The clay for this work was sent from Chicago to Boston, Loring manufacturing the product in the idle Boston Fire Brick Company's plant. And here the story of Loring ends.

Precept and Precedent

In an address before the Wisconsin Society of Architects at Milwaukee on October 28 on "How Can Architects Make Themselves an Essential Factor in Wisconsin Social Economy?" Mr. Emery S. Hall, emphasizing the obligation of architects to make their value and service known to the people of the State, made several points worthy of note:

"The architect is the only person connected with a building project who is in a position to know what it actually cost. That information should be available to prospective bond underwriters and loan agencies, and it should be a condition precedent to the sale of buildings bonds to the public. To be a party to padded cost tabulations or to wilfully make false statements as to cost or character of construction should be good cause and sufficient reason for the prompt revocation of an architect's certificate of registration."

Asked to outline the organization of the Illinois Society of Architects, Mr. Hall stated: "The Illinois Society of Architects was formed by a committee of the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects to promote the passage of an architectural license law. Such a law was passed and became of effect in July, 1897. The Society then organized was the first of its kind and still continues."

A subject touched in the address before the Wisconsin Society of Architects is further explained by Mr. Hall in a letter to President Russell of the A. I. A.: "The broker general contractor is the outgrowth of mixing building finance with contracting. It is the economic cause of the bankruptcy that has been so prevalent among speculative building. The custom of issuing junior bonds to the general contractor, which he takes at a discount of from 20% to 25% and forces on his sub-contractors at what amounts to an additional discount of 10%, 15%, or 20%, loads a building with so much water that it is impossible for it to live financially except during boom times. This was the practice which prevailed, to a large extent, preceding the financial crash of 1929. Please make no mistake; I do not advocate the splitting up of contracts any more than is necessary to eliminate the waste incident to purely broker contracts. If there are contractors who have organizations expertly manned to do all of the work of the separate trades under one management, there is an unquestionable economic value in using them. Such contractors have to have real capital to carry on their work. We draw the line, in our office, except for minor contracts when the contractor reaches the point where he is not equipped to do the work with his own men."

Anker Sveere Graven passed away suddenly October 16th while on a hunting trip near his boyhood home. Both as architect and friend, the loss of Mr. Graven will be felt by many. He was well known as a theater architect. Burial was in Menominee, Wisconsin, the home of his parents who survive him. He leaves a wife and young son.

Mrs. John J. Glessner of 1800 Prairie Avenue died on October 19th after a long illness. Mrs. Glessner was a leader in early Chicago society and interested in many of the cultural and civic activities of the city. Her graciousness will be missed by all those who knew her. Mrs. Glessner occupied the home, designed by Richardson, which Mr. and Mrs. Glessner deeded to the Chicago Chapter, A. I. A.